SMU launches one-year MBA programme

BY CHAN CHAO PEH

Singapore Management University (SMU) has finally launched its Master’s in Business Administration (MBA) programme, adding to the crowded field of MBAs offered by the two other mainstream local universities, the handful of international business schools, and the dozens of correspondence courses available here.

Despite being a late entrant into this market, SMU is confident the programme will be well received. The tuition fees of $53,800 and $49,800 for the part-time and full-time programmes respectively, are about 30% higher than what National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University are charging.

SMU hopes to attract applicants with six to 15 years of working experience. It is placing greater emphasis on the “soft skills” of business, such as organisational behaviour and human resource management — subjects that typically are electives in most other MBA programmes. In this case, however, they are core modules that all students will have to take.

"The world has changed. This product is designed around ‘soft skills’," says Professor Tan Chin Tiong, deputy president and provost of SMU. As early as a decade ago, business schools focused more on “hard skills” like accounting and finance.

Other core subjects include Negotiating in Business and Presenting Your Case, Leading Across Cultures, and Understanding Global Economy and Political Risk. Students must complete 11 core and at least 10 elective subjects.

To make it more attractive to people in a hurry, SMU has structured the programme after the European-style, one-year MBA programme. In contrast, MBAs from US business schools like Wharton, on which SMU is largely modelled after, take two years to complete.

"This is a very tough programme. It might put some people off, but we are looking for people who want to work very hard for that year," says Doris Sohmen-Pao, SMU’s new director of MBA programme. Sohmen-Pao, who holds a Harvard MBA, worked in a similar capacity at INSEAD.

"If you want traditional, conventional MBAs, this is not the place," says Professor Pang Eng Fong, dean of SMU’s Lee Kong Chian School of Business, who is also vice-provost, academic strategic planning.

SMU expects to kick off the programme with a first intake of between 30 and 50 students each for both the part-time and full-time programmes. The former starts in September, while the latter will start next January.

The university promises intensive counselling and attention for every student. "We are not a mass-MBA stamping university; the intention is to focus on individual education," says Sohmen-Pao.

While many MBA programmes pride themselves on putting together classes with students from as many nationalities as possible, SMU will not go all out to attract international students just for the sake of doing so.

"We are not focusing on nationality. We are looking at experience rather than passport," says Sohmen-Pao.

SMU has set high targets for the programme, hoping to have it ranked No 1 in Singapore after the European-style, one-year MBA programme. Sohmen-Pao, who holds a Harvard MBA, worked in a similar capacity at INSEAD.

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